With compliments of Dr. Agorastes.

AMPHIOXUS AND ASCIDIAN

OUR GELATINOUS ANCESTORS.

How the missing links were discovered and made known.

Imitated from the German of M. Reymond ("Das neue Laienbrevier des Hœckelismus: Gesang 13), and dedicated to Professor R. Ramsay Wright, M.A., B.Sc., etc., and to the learned President and Members of the Canadian Institute, Toronto,

By DR. PHIL. AGORASTES.

I.

A lancelet (Amphioxus lanceolatus) finds it pleasant on Posilippo's shore.

A slimy lancelet once lay
  Half-hidden in the golden sand
Of Naples' blue and balmy bay—
And thought—how pleasant, here, to-day
  Is Posilippo's strand.

Horrid advent of an anatomist.

But on the horizon's shadowy brim
  A horrid vision doth arise—
A spectacled Professor grim!
All things that creep, crawl, fly, or swim,
  Must he anatomize!

The lancelet captured, and pronounced a vertebrate.

A "find" his eager senses sniff—
He stoops—he sees: with joy elate
He grasps the creature in a jiff—
And cries—now, I'll be jiggered—if
It isn't vertebrate!

The lancelet's objections to this view.

The victim groan'd—"Come, that's *too* pale—
Don't try on me that precious cram—
Limpid and soft from top to tail,
I'm nothing but a naked snail—
Ask Pallas* what I am!"

The Professor's answer.

The horrid "Zoo" made answer, "nay!
I mean, my dear, myself to 'fix' it:
No wise man trusts what others say,
Or heeds, in this far-searching day,
The dead Past's *ipse dixit!*"

A deed of horror.

So saying, without more ado,
(To tender feeling sadly callous)
He slit poor Slimy through and through,
And bottled—as he'd bottle you—
This pseudo-snail of Pallas!

Result of investigations.

And thus, although the little nata-
Torial beast has no backbone,
For reasons based on larval data
It came among the Vertebrata
A place, at last, to own!

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* A celebrated German naturalist of the last century, who first described the lancelet in 1778, and regarded it as a kind of slug. The vertebrate nature of the animal, based on the presence of a chorda dorsalis, was first shewn by Corda, in 1834; and its relations to the larval condition of certain tunicates or ascidians, by Kowalewsky in 1866. It is now commonly looked upon as the lowest type of the Fish series.

II.

Another Professor!

Pass thirty years and two—Ah me!
How quick Time gallops!—Then there came
A learnëd Russ to that blue sea—
To fish for tunicates came he,
Also to fish for fame!

A good "bag."

And so before his zeal should flag,
Or fall below its high meridian*—
To work he went with dredge and drag,
And fished up quite a thumping bag
Of things ascidian!

The great news.

And then came out the startling truth—
Let all the world's four corners hear it!
The ascidian in its frisky youth
Is half a vertebrate, in sooth,
Or something somewhere near it!

Hæckel on the move.

Swift sped the news o'er land and sea,
Till reaching Hæckel's ears—that great
Stem-framer—in vacation free—
Pack'd up, and went post-haste to see
This yea-nay vertebrate!

The missing links.

And there, our great Ontogenist—
Whose word bewitches whilst it shocks us—
Beheld the links his System miss'd:
Yes, here they were—or he'd be hiss'd—
Ascidian—Amphioxus!

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* I have touched the highest point—
And from that full meridian of my glory
I haste now to my setting.—*Shakespeare.*

The Stem-Theory completed.

All things are sure to one who waits:
And here the links at last were seen
Made manifest to meanest pates—
Invertebrated Vertebrates—
Fishes and worms between!

The final link.

Thus, hæckelism's wondrous gleam
Makes clear, to all, how all arose—
Backward and forward went the stream
Of shifting forms, like shapes of dream,
And found in us its close!

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